

The TINDER BOX

by
MARIA THOMPSON DAVIES
AUTHOR OF
"THE MELTING OF MOLLY"



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PROLOGUE.

Evelina was "The Tinder Box," and this was the task assigned her:

"You are to rise and establish with your fellow man a plane of common citizenship. You do it for his sake and your own and for that of humanity. You are to claim the same right to express your emotions that a man has. You are to offer your friendship to both men and women on the same frank terms, with no degrading hesitancy caused by an embarrassment on account of your sex. It is man's due and yours. No form of affection is to be withheld from him, and when the time comes that you feel the mating instinct in you move toward any man I charge you that you are to consider it a sacred obligation to express it with the same honesty that a man would express the same thing to you in like case even if he has shown no sign of that impulse toward you."

How did this novel reform work out? Read, and the answer will be yours.

CHAPTER I.

The Load.

"All love is a gas, and it takes either loneliness, strength of character or religion to liquify it into a condition to be ladled out of us, due to another. There is a certain desperately volatile state of it, and occasionally people, especially of opposite sexes, try to administer it to each other in that form, with asphyxiation resulting to both hearts. And I'm willing to confess that it is generally a woman's fault when such an accident occurs. That is, it is a mistake of her nature, not one of intent. But she is learning."

Also when a woman is created, the winds have wood star dust, rose dew, peach down, and a few mist shavings into a whirlwind of delirium, and the world at large looks on in wonder and some amazement, as well as breathless interest. I know, because I am one, and have just been waked up by the gyrations of the cyclone, and I'm deeply confounded. I don't like it, and wish I could have slept longer, but Fate said Jane Mathers deserved other wiles. At least Jane deserved, and Fate seems so far helpless to controvert the decree."

I might have known that when this jolly, easy going old Fate of mine, which I inherited from a lot of indolent, pleasure loving Harpeth valley Tennesseans, let me pack up my graduating thesis, my B. S., and some delicious frocks, and go off to Paris for a degree from the Beaux Arts in Architecture, we would be caught up with by some kind of Nemesis or other, and put in our place in the biological and ethnological scheme of existence. Yes, Fate, and I am placed, and Jane did it. Also, I am glad, now that I know what is going to happen to me, that I had last week on shipboard, with Michael Hall, bushwhacking my cousin's regions with his honest eyes and booming voice discreetly, muffled to accord with the moonlight and the quiet places around the deck. I may never get that sort of a joy drink again, but it was so well done that it will help me to administer the same to others when the awful occasion arrives."

"A woman is the spark that lights the flame on the altar of the inner man, dear, and you'll have to sparkle when your time comes," he warned me as I hurried what might have been a very tender parting the last night at sea. "Spark"—she's a conflagration by this new plan of Jane's, but I'm glad he didn't know about it then. He may have to suffer from it yet. It is best for him to be as happy as he can as long as he can."

"Evelina, dear," said Jane, as she and Mary Elizabeth Connors and I sat in the suit of apartments in which our proud Alma Mater had lodged us old grads, returned for our second degrees. "Your success has been remarkable, and I am certain that I have chosen the right person for the glorious mission I am about to offer you."

"Oh, no, Jane!" I exclaimed, from a sort of instinct for trouble to come. I know that devoted, twenty-second century look in Jane's intense, nearsighted eyes and I always tend from it. She became captain of my freshman soul at the same time she captured the captaincy of the boat crew, on which I pulled stroke, and I'm still hitting the water when she gives the word, though it now looks as if we are both adrift on the high and uncharted seas or sitting on the lid of a tinder box juggling lighted torches."

"You see, dear," she went on to say slowly, "for these two years while you have been growing and developing along all your natural lines in a country which was not your own, in a little pool I should call it, out of even sight and sound of the current of events, we have been here in your own land engaged in the great work of the organization and reorganization which is molding the destinies of the women of our times and those that

come after us. That is what I want to talk to you about, and devoutly have I been praying that your heart will be receptive to the call that has claimed the life of Mary Elizabeth and me. There is a particular work, for which you are fitted as no other woman I have ever known is fitted, and I want to lay the case plainly before you tonight. Will you give me a hearing?"

And the hearing I gave that beloved and devout woman was the revelling that swayed me to this—this whirlwind that seems to be both inside me and outside me and everywhere else in the whole world. It's not woman's suffrage; it has gone way down past the road from votes for women. I wish I could have stopped in that political field of endeavor before Jane got to me.

Of course, for years, as all women have been doing who are sensible enough to use the brains God gave them and stop depending on their centuries seasoned intuitions and fascinations, I have been reading about this feminist revolution that seems all of a sudden to have revolved from nobody knows where, and I have been generally indignant over things whether I am devoted to them or not, and I have felt that I was being oppressed by the opposite sex, even if I could not locate the exact spot of the pain produced."

When my father died in my junior year and left me all alone in the world the first thing that made me feel life in my veins again was the unholy rage I experienced when I found that he had left me bequeathed and otherwise to my fifth cousin, James Hardin. Cousin James is a healthy reversion to the primitive type of Father Abraham, and he has so much aristocratic moss on him that he reminds me of that old gray crag that hangs over Silver creek out on Providence road. Artistically he is perfectly beautiful in an old Testament fashion. He lives in an ancient, rambling house across the road from my home, and he is a source of sorrow and delight to all. Everybody that dies in Glendale leaves him a relic, and including his mother, Cousin Martha, he now has either seven or nine female charges, depending on the sex of Sally Carruthers' twin babies, which I can't exactly remember, but will wager is feminine."

My being left to him was an insult to me, though, of course, father did not see it that way. He advised the Crag, as everybody else in Glendale does, and wouldn't have considered not leaving him precious me. Wanting to ignore Cousin James because I was bound out to him until my twenty-fifth year or marriage, which is worse, has kept me from Glendale all these four years since father died suddenly while I was away at college, laid up with the ankle which I broke in the gymnasium. As much as I resent him, I keep the letter the Crag wrote me the night after father died, right where I can put my hand on it if life suddenly panics me for any reason. It covers all the circumstances I have yet met. I wonder if I ought to burn it now!

But, to be honest with myself, I will have to confess that the explosively sentimental scene on the front porch the night I left for college with Polk Hayes has had something to do with my cowardice in lingering in foreign climes. I feel that it is something I will have to go on with some day, and the devil will have to pick up the chips. Polk is the kind of man that ought to be exterminated by the government in sympathy for its women wards, if his plan didn't make much good citizens when they do finally marry. He ought at least to be labeled "poison for the very young." I was very young out on the porch that night. Still I don't resent him like I do the archaic Crag."

And as Jane talked my seasoned indignation of four years against my keeper flared up, and while she paused at intervals for breath I hurried out plans for his demolition. I wish now I had been more conservatively quiet and left myself a loophole, but I didn't. I walked into this situation and shut the door behind me."

"Yes, Evelina, I think you will have to insist forcibly on assuming charge of your own social and financial affairs in your own home. You are to rise and establish with your fellow man a plane of common citizenship. You do it for his sake and your own and for that of humanity."

"Suppose after I get up there on that plateau I didn't find any man at all?" I ventured faintly, but with a ripple of my risibles, the last in life, I fear.

"You must reach down your hands to them and draw them up to you," she answered in a tone of tonic inspiration. "You are to claim the same right to express your emotions that a man has. You are to offer your friendship to both men and women on the same frank terms, with no degrading hesitancy caused by an embarrassment on account of your sex. It is his due and yours. No form of affection is to be withheld from him. It is to be done frankly and impressively, and when the time comes that you feel the mating instinct in you move toward any man I charge you that you are to consider it a sacred obligation to express it with the same honesty that a man would express the same thing to you in like case even if he has shown no sign of that impulse toward you. No contentions and contemptible indirect method of attack, but a fearless one that is yours by right and his, though he may not acknowledge it. His bur-

baric and senseless old convention that denies woman the right of selection, for which God has given her the superior instinct, is to be broken down by just such women as you. A woman less dowered by beauty and all feminine charm could not do it just yet, but to you, to whom the command of men is a natural gift, is granted the wonderful chance to prove that it can be done honestly and triumphantly, with no sacrifice of the sacredness of womanhood."

"Oh, Jane!" I moaned into the arm of the chair on which I had bowed my head. "I am moaning now just as much down in the bottom of my heart. Where are all my gentle forebears that smiled behind their lace fans and had their lily white hands kissed by cavalier gentlemen in starched ruffles out under the stars that rise over Old Harpeth that they don't claim me in a calm and peaceful death's Still, as much as I would like to die, I am interested in what is going to happen."

"Yes, Evelina," she answered in an adamant tone of voice, "and when I have the complete record of what I know will be your triumphant vindication of the truth that it is possible and advisable for women to assert their divine right to choose their mate for their sacred vocation of bearing the race I shall proceed, as I have told you, to choose five other suitable young women to follow your example and furnish them the money up to the sum of \$100,000 after having been convinced by your experience. Be careful to make the most minute records of even the most emotional phases of the question in this book for their guidance. Of course they will never know the source of the data, and I will help you elucidate and arrange the book after it is all accomplished."

If Jane hadn't had \$200,000 all this trouble would not be. "I can never do it!" I exclaimed with horror. "And the men will hate it—and me. And if I did do it I couldn't write it."

I almost sobbed as a vision flashed before me of this verbally snaphot-



"A woman is the flame that lights the spark."

ting the scene with dear old Dickie as we stood against the rail of the ship and watched the waves fling back silver radiance at the full moon, and I also wondered how I was to render in serviceable written data his husky: "A woman is the flame that lights the spark."

For what would that interview with Polk Hayes look like reproduced with high lights?

"Now," she answered encouragingly. "Don't fear the men, dear. They are sensible and businesslike creatures, and they will soon see how much to their advantage it is to be married to women who have had an equal privilege with themselves of knowing their preferences. Of course, a woman's pride will make her refrain from courtship, as does her brother man, until she is financially independent and self supporting, lest she be put in the position of a mendicant." Jane has thought the whole thing out from Genesis to Revelation.

"A woman would have to be—to be a good deal of a woman, not any less one, to put such a thing across, Jane," I said, with a preface of some of the things that might happen in such a cruel crusade of reformation and deprivation of rights.

"That is the reason I have chosen you to collect the data, Evelina," answered Jane, with another of those glorious tonic looks, issuing from my back-bone in her back. "The ultimate woman must be superb in body, brain and heart. You are that now more nearly than any one I have ever seen. You are the woman!"

I was silenced with awe. "Jane plans to choose five girls who would otherwise have to spend their lives teaching in crowded cities after leaving college and to start them in any profession they choose, with every chance of happiness, in the smaller cities of the south and middle west," said Mary Elizabeth gently, and somewhat the tears rose in my eyes, as I thought how the poor dear had been teaching in the high school in Chicago the two glorious years I had been frolicking abroad. No time, and no men to have good times with."

(To be continued.)

In spite of all they say against our submarines, no doubt they would soon be perfectly safe where the enemy can't get them at the bottom of the sea."

It is claimed that the old geographical will be rendered obsolete by the war, but anyway they are mighty convenient things to set up on the desk and conceal a story paper.

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Harvest Festivals Are As Ancient As Humanity

Ever since human beings began to till the soil the ingathering of the harvest has been marked with festive celebrations, and this custom has persisted in various forms throughout the ages and in all lands. The harvest feast is the most universal and doubtless the oldest of all celebrations, and it is as general today as when our savage ancestors of prehistoric spirit which animated the old "feast of the ingathering" is manifested at the multitude of fairs and exhibitions which are held at this season throughout the land, while Thanksgiving Day also partakes to some extent of the nature of mankind's oldest observance. The farmers of ancient Rome and Greece and Asia, at this festive period, manifested their gratitude toward the gods of fertility. The Jews of the world, although now largely a commercial people, are celebrating this week the Succoth festival, in commemoration of that distant period when their agricultural ancestors of Palestine gave thanks to Jehovah for blessing them with bountiful crops.

In the old days in Great Britain, when agriculture was still the principal pursuit of its people and life was much simpler than now, the harvest festival was marked by many customs which seem quaint and amusing to the sophisticated farmer of today, who, through the daily newspaper, the telephone, the telegraph and the postal service, has had the city brought to his very door. This day, the twenty-fourth of September, was a popular date for those observances known as the Harvest Home in England and the Kirk in Scotland, which were transplanted to the New World by the English and Scotch colonists.

The grain last cut was loaded on a wagon and formed the central feature of a triumphal procession, in which all the people of the countryside participated. Many old songs gave expression to their joy at the conclusion of the harvest. One of the most popular of these ran as follows:

"Harvest-home, harvest-home,
We have ploughed, we have sowed,
We have reaped, we have mowed,
We have brought home every load!"

While no one can regret that modern science and invention have provided the farmer with a multitude of mechanical appliances for easing his toilsome labor, it is too bad that the age of machinery has smothered the joyous sentiments expressed in these lines:

"The boughs do shake, and the bells do ring;
So merrily comes our harvest in,
Our harvest in, our harvest in;
So merrily comes our harvest in!"

And who can imagine a present-day farm laborer singing this toast to his "bore":

"And send his increase!"
"Here's a health to our master,
The lord of the feast;
God bless his endeavors."

There is a general feeling that the place of emergency loan and relief should be pushed through at once, so that every agriculturist shall be able to have an automobile.

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Every person, firm or corporation, resident or non-resident, liable to taxation on real or personal property, in the Town of Stratford on September 1st, 1915, MUST FILE with the Board of Assessors, a sworn statement of all taxable property owned by such person, firm or corporation in the Town of Stratford on specially printed lists furnished by the Assessors. Such lists must be filed during the month of September, 1915. Failure to do so will compel the Assessors to make out such list from the best information obtainable, to which a penalty of ten per cent. will be added as by the law required. Each parcel of real estate must be described by metes and bounds; by street number or lot number; all buildings thereon must be entered separately from the land.

Failure to file list deprives the owner of the right to appeal to the Board of Relief.

Hours: 9 a. m. to 4 p. m. and from 7 p. m. to 8:30 p. m., commencing September 7th.

BOARD OF ASSESSORS.
Stratford, Conn., August 24, 1915.
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State of Connecticut Treasury Department.

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A HEAVY PENALTY

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